

Who's Renting These Boys?

Wiktor Grodecki's Czech Hustler Documentaries

Kevin Moss

As controls on sex, sexuality, and capitalism relaxed in the former Warsaw Pact countries after 1989, pornography and prostitution flourished. The main center of both industries in the 90s in Central and Eastern Europe was Prague, which also became the favored destination of Westerners eager to explore the "new Paris." Gay porn and male prostitutes were among Prague's attractions. As the Westernmost outpost of the Slavic world, Prague had always had a special place in the Orientalist construct of Eastern Europe. West of Berlin and Vienna, Prague was nevertheless perceived as the East by its German-speaking neighbors. Larry Wolff writes about how Mozart invented nonsense language and silly nicknames for members of his party as he traveled West to Prague.[1] A cosmopolitan who could understand most of the languages of Western Europe was completely baffled by Slavic. The Slavs' sexuality, like their language, was inscrutable and therefore open to Western projection. Edward Said describes the Arab Orient as a place where Westerners expected "sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" and "a different type of

sexuality." [2] While Said's analysis is framed in heterosexual terms, the sexually available feminine Orient that can be penetrated and catalogued by the rational West is neither always female nor always heterosexual. Joseph Boone's "Homoerotics of Orientalism" shows just how important - even central - gay sexuality was in the orientalist project: "the possibility of sexual contact with and between men underwrites and at times even explains the historical appeal of orientalism as an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation, and control." [3] Robert Aldrich's *Colonialism and Homosexuality* is an even more thorough examination of the connections between homosexuality and imperialism from the 1800s on. [4] The same kind of relaxation of compulsory heterosexuality that allowed Flaubert to dabble in boys in Egypt functions for Westerners in Eastern Europe as well. Wolff cites Casanova's experiments with same-sex sex (the only such episode described in his voluminous memoirs) in Russia. [5] For some gay Westerners in the 90s, Prague became the place to look for "sexual experience unavailable in Europe." As Matti Bunzl documents, Austrian men found a different type of sexuality described through tropes of "availability, passion, and pansexuality." [6]

Czech rent boys - indeed all Czechs, according to the gay Austrians, were not constrained by the homo/hetero binary of traditional

Austrian society - they had a different type of sexuality. The lower age of consent and economic disparity meant that younger boys were more readily available than in Vienna - a sexual experience unavailable in Western Europe. Colonial and orientalist exploitation can produce a backlash. Rudi Bleys writes about how nativist Africans began to describe homosexuality, which had earlier been described by Europeans as an African vice, instead as a European import, unknown in native tradition.[7] The same kind of moral outrage that had been part of the racist colonizing project was reversed: it was the Europeans who had corrupted the hitherto pure Africans. As I have shown elsewhere, conservatives in Eastern Europe regularly conflated sexual dissidence with political dissidence.[8] Valentin Rasputin, for example, said of homosexuality, "That kind of contact between men is a foreign import. If they feel their rights are infringed they can always go and live in another country." [9]

A similar reaction to gay pornography and prostitution in Prague can be found in the films of Wiktor Grodecki. Wiktor Grodecki is a Pole who studied film in the US, then returned to Poland in 1992. His three films about Czech rent boys, *Not Angels, but Angels* (*Andele nejsou andele* 1994), *Body without Soul* (*Telo bez duše* 1996), and *Mandragora* (1997) purport to be objective, honest documentaries in which (in the language of the video box) the boys' "frankness and

need to talk become the engine that drives the film." [10] In reality, Grodecki's films are both highly manipulated and highly manipulative in ways that serve to enforce "normal" sexuality while demonizing various "abnormal" sexual practices. At the same time they portray these practices as an import from the colonizing capitalist West. In *The Celluloid Closet* Vito Russo documents the ways gay material was censored in Hollywood under the Hays Code. Plays about gay characters became films about Jews or about characters with unnamed differences. He cites several filmmakers who claim their films are not about homosexuality, but about loneliness, or insanity, or the power of lies to destroy people's lives, about anything but homosexuality. [11]

In fact, though, they were about homosexuality, even if that homosexuality was veiled in the film. Analysis of films from Central and Eastern Europe in the 80s and 90s reveals the reverse strategy: films with overtly queer characters use homosexuality as a metaphor for something else: politics, nationality, anything but a real analysis of real homosexuality. In the former Yugoslavia Srdjan Karanović's *Virginia* (1992) and Eelimir Eilnik's *Marble Ass* (1994) use sworn virgins and transvestite prostitutes to critique nationalism in Yugoslavia. In Hungary Karoly Makk's *Another Way* (1982) uses lesbianism to disguise the film's portrayal of the Revolution of 1956, and Istvan Szabó's *Colonel Redl* (1984)

soft-pedals Redl's homosexuality to reveal how totalitarian regimes rewrite history. Sergei Livnev's *Hammer and Sickle* (1994) uses a sex-change operation as a metaphor for the excesses of Stalin's system while expressing contemporary anxieties about masculinity. Grodecki's films are no exception to this pattern: while they purport to be documentaries about gay rent boys, the boys are in fact a metaphor for capitalist exploitation. The first film of Grodecki's trilogy, is *Not Angels, but Angels* (1994). It is made up of a dozen or so interviews with the rent boys and one pimp. The interviews are cut apart and arranged by theme, so we hear, for example, all the boys tell their names and ages, then all talk about how they started, and so on. Since the questions of the interviewer are (for the most part) cut out, one gets the impression that the boys are just speaking on their own, telling their stories - as if, indeed, the boys "need to talk becomes the engine that drives the film." They talk about what they like and what they don't like in bed, about clients, about prices for different acts and different situations (the train station vs. clubs, Czechs vs. foreigners, sucking vs. fucking), about AIDS and safe sex. Yet while it claims to be an objective documentary, Grodecki's film is in fact heavily-handedly manipulative and moralistic. It is not so much the texts of the boys' interviews that show the director's hand as the staging and camera angles, the montage, the non-diegetic music on the soundtrack, and the ordering of the material. As the boys reveal secrets Grodecki

hopes the audience will be shocked at, the sound of choral church music (Bach and Mozart, as well as jarring Tibetan chants) takes over the soundtrack, and the boys' interviews are intercut with religious statues in Prague shot from below, as if the saints were looking down in stern judgment. In the section where the boys say that what they do is prostitution (of which many don't appear to be particularly ashamed or embarrassed), the background music is a sad soprano vocalise. In a later section Grodecki uses the *Rex tremendae* from Mozart's *Requiem* to accompany an ever-faster montage of porn, pinball-playing, and purported customers' faces to describe the whirlwind of destruction into which the poor boys find themselves sucked. Though underplayed comments throughout the film suggest that many of the boys do in fact prefer sleeping with men, the last scene confirms what Grodecki would like us to believe, that these poor children being exploited by gay men are of course really straight: one boy says, "a man wanted to look at me when I sleep with any girl. That was the nicest work." Because of the prejudices already encoded in Western culture (including Czech and Polish here - Grodecki is a Pole), Grodecki need only highlight the sexual activities of the boys in order to evoke the disapproval of the audience. In her article "Thinking Sex," Gayle Rubin describes how "hierarchies of sexual value" function in much the same way as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize

the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble." [12] Her diagram shows the charmed circle of good and bad sexual practices.

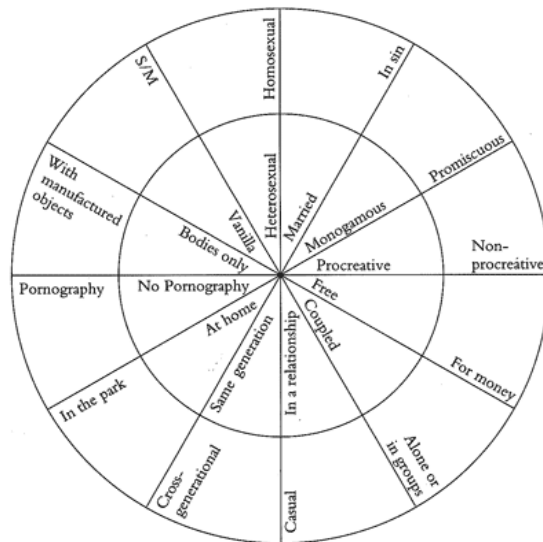


Figure 1. The sex hierarchy: the charmed circle vs. the outer limits [13]

Grodecki deploys all of these categories, and then some. The sex the boys practice is (working around the circle) homosexual, non-marital, promiscuous, non-procreative, for money,

sometimes in groups, casual, cross-generational, not at home. Later films introduce pornography, manufactured objects, and S/M. Rubin refers to the battles "between the primary producers of sexual ideology - churches, the family, the shrinks, and the media - and the groups whose experience they name, distort, and endanger." [14] Grodecki, representing the media, uses the church and the family as his not-so-covert allies in distorting the experience of the rent boys. The church is evoked through liturgical music and religious statues. The only thing on Rubin's list missing from the films is the shrinks. Another tactic is only slightly more subtle. Grodecki's films provide a textbook case of the function of the male gaze. John Berger first pointed out that women appear nude in the visual arts for the presumed male spectator and owner: "men act and women appear." [15]

Laura Mulvey developed the theory of the importance of the male gaze in film in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance (she writes), pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly." [16] The presumed controlling gaze is both male and heterosexual, or at least heterosexist. What this means for Grodecki's films is that the rent boys are cast in the role of passive victims, denied any agency or subject position even as

they are allowed to speak what are supposedly their own stories. Camera angles and staging emphasize the boys' passivity: the camera often looks down on them, they are shot reclining languorously or even in one case relaxing in a bubble-bath. Their poses and demeanor often suggest passivity, femininity, and victimhood. Just as in hetero films analyzed by Mulvey, we find here 3 looks associated with the cinema: "that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion." [17] Normally, writes Mulvey, film conventions deny the first two to "prevent a distancing awareness in the audience." [18] But Grodecki *wants* such distancing here - is the gaze of the camera and the audience identical with the active/male voyeur that objectivizes and victimizes the boys? No, Grodecki wants to reassure his audience, because that gaze is gay, while we are not. In case the audience has any doubts, he includes a few shots of leering male faces, presumed customers, who are probably foreigners and invariably ugly and old. Of course they are not us, the audience! It is not *we* who are objectifying these boys. The faces are shown in lurid lighting, and in these scenes the boys are totally immobilized into porn-stills for consumption. They are also silenced: they have neither subjectivity nor voice, they are mute objects for the enjoyment of the men. The issue of the gaze becomes more complex in the second film, *Body without Soul* (*Telo bez duse*

1996), because it features a Czech pornographer who shoots the rent boys in his films. Of course it is no coincidence that the spheres of pornography and prostitution overlap. They are the two major forms of commercial sex; our word "pornography" even comes from the Greek for writing by or about prostitutes. This film repeats many of the devices of the first: the boys introduce themselves, describe their work - again to the tune of dramatic classical music - this time Mahler and Vivaldi - and intercut with Prague statues of angels. Again the film ends on a note that reinstates the heterosexual family as the privileged norm: after the boys have talked about preferring boys or living with both a girlfriend and a boyfriend, one says "I do love someone a lot - Šmý father" and the final song speaks of a "mother's tears for her dead son." Rubin writes that marginal sexual worlds are portrayed by mainstream media as "impoverished, ugly, and inhabited by psychopaths and criminals." [19]

Grodecki found a perfect medium for this film in pornographer Pavel Rousek whose day job is performing autopsies at the morgue. If *Not Angels, but Angels* juxtaposed the experiences of the boys with *contrasting* spiritual statues and music, *Body without Soul* employs montage to shock by *association*, almost like aversion therapy. Grodecki cuts from Rousek directing naked boys in the film to Rousek dissecting naked bodies in the morgue. The parallels

are brilliant and effective. The scenes begin when Rousek talks about the importance of having a bottom - a passive participant in anal sex - for the film. Discussion of penetrating the buttocks - a site of terror for the straight male - is accompanied by ominous drum music. The film cuts to the morgue. The boys undress in Rousek's apartment; Rousek suits up at the morgue. He puts on gloves - which he calls "protection." Grodecki intercuts with immobilized stills here, the better to hold them in our gaze. The Requiem text is ominous, as the interview turns to AIDS and death. Prostitution=pornography=AIDS=death (with some drugs and beatings along the way). Bodies are just bodies, flesh is just flesh. The dance of death, again set to religious music, goes faster and faster until we reach climax - death on the one hand, a cumshot (cut from one version of the film) on the other, followed by Rousek washing up and the boys talking about love. *Body without Soul* complicates the issue of the gaze because we see what Mulvey says film conventions usually deny - Rousek's camera as it records the profilmic event. Again I would argue Grodecki does this to disengage the audience (and himself) from implication in the objectifying gaze of the pornographer's camera. Perhaps if Rousek is himself the object of our gaze, we are not the consumers of his product. But who is? Germans of course, capitalist Westerners. John D'Emilio's essay, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" demonstrates how beginning in the late 19th century wage

labor allowed for some men and women to organize a personal life around an erotic/emotional attraction to the same sex.[20] Increasing mobility and a decrease in the importance of the family as an economic entity helped create an environment in which a homosexual identity could be constructed by gay men and women who congregated in urban areas.[21] Similar changes in conditions (increased mobility, relaxation of social controls, market capitalism) allowed for the proliferation of sex workers in cities like Prague in the 90s. Because of the imbalance of wealth between Western and Eastern Europe, however, there has been a tendency for sex workers to become a site of colonial exploitation of the East by the West: hustlers from Eastern Europe work in the West and Western sex tourists come to Eastern Europe for cheap sex. (We can add "sex with an imperialist foreigner" to Rubin's circle of bad sex.) In *Not Angels, but Angels*, the boys mention that most of their customers are Germans. *Body without Soul* amplifies this fear of colonization. The implication is that not only do the consumers of boy-sex and pornography come from the West, but - in a myth that recurs often in the context of Eastern Europe - marginalized sexual tastes (read homosexuality) do as well. And of course they lead to death: Germans won't buy the films if condoms are used. The box for *Body without Soul* refers to "sexual tourists" and a "callous disregard for the lethal dangers of AIDS." [22] While HIV may be transmitted on a porn set, it would seem that a porn shoot, in which

the cum shots have to be on camera, is not the most likely site for infection. Still, if some boys used as actors are infected, this is blamed on the German consumers (who may very well be infecting them in their other role as prostitutes). Even the fearless butcher Rousek cowers before the predatory Western fag: he is afraid to go to Prague's leather bar SAM (to research S/M for a plot) because "in an Amsterdam leather bar a huge bald man wanted to make love to him." With his last film, *Mandragora* (1997), Grodecki gives up all pretense of making a documentary - though the box still claims that "all the events in this film actually occurred, and were photographed just as the street kids described them." *Mandragora* is in fact a feature film, scripted by Grodecki and one of the rent boys, David Svec. It is the dramatization of Grodecki's fantasy of the boys' experience, this time with no messy testimony by the boys themselves to get in the way of the director's interpretation of their lives. A boy, Marek, comes to Prague from a provincial town after committing a petty theft. In the main station (which we already know as a site of prostitution) he is robbed and beaten himself and falls into the clutches of a pimp. He is drugged and raped, then beaten again. Another boy, David, befriends him, and they try to move out on their own, but keep falling back into the cycle of beatings, crime, drugs, prostitution and pornography. New themes introduced in this film include the provincial/big city distinction (needless to say, the province is unspoiled, the

city corrupt - this is standard fare for conservatives in Eastern Europe) and the even stronger emphasis on family. Marek is corrupted by the big city. When he and David return to David's home town for his father's birthday (he is too ashamed to go in the apartment), the working class men in the bar vent their anger at the boys' ostentatious wealth: "we work all our lives and can barely afford a beer, these big city boys come and buy a bottle of scotch - and corrupt our girls!" (We can add "sex in the big city" to Rubin's circle of bad sex.) David cries at the rift with his father. Marek's father too plays a role in the film, even coming to the corrupt big city himself to find his lost son. When he says he is "looking for his boy," the pimps offer him another one. Of course he gets justifiably angry and trashes the bar and beats the fags. Later a boy offers his services, and the father follows him, only to cry and embrace him. Marek and his father miss each other constantly by seconds. A final poignant scene has them in the men's room of the train station separated by a stall partition - Marek having overdosed and slit his leg with a knife, his father on his way home to the sanity of the provinces. Still, family in the film seems curiously truncated: David misses his father, Marek's father comes after him. One wonders where the mothers are. In provincial Eastern Europe, this is an odd omission. Marek's father is violent: he beats Marek and later other gay men. But this is never an issue for Grodecki. Neither is the fact that in Ustina Labem everyone talks about work, but they are only seen

to behaving out at the local bar. Unemployment is not a problem, but drug abuse and homosexuality in the cities are problems. The gaze of the characters employed in *Mandragora* is meant to parallel that of the audience. Both Marek and his father are shown fresh from the provinces, and the camera focuses on their faces as they watch in puzzled shock the excesses of Prague: a drag queen singing, boys dancing with each other, two boys kissing! Perhaps the father's most shocking voyeuristic moment comes in the bar brawl, when he pulls down the curtain of the darkroom to reveal what looks like an orgy, with everyone naked and oblivious to the absence of the curtain. Marek, on the other hand, is shocked but also intrigued by the gay life he sees, and he eventually falls in love with David. In *Mandragora* we get the full panoply of objectifying characters, including the clients, who are predictably bizarre, ugly, criminal, and Western. There is a married professor from Heidelberg; there is a British queen who lives in a palace and puts Marek on a pedestal and then beats him bloody; and there is Rudy, the "American" - really a Czech who has returned from exile in style. Rudy wears a cowboy hat, drives a Cadillac, rents a whole floor of the Prague Hotel, and hides his money in a small model of the Statue of Liberty. First David and Marek drug and rob him. But payback comes when he lures David in and sodomizes him with a pool cue, then hands him over to the police. The scene with the British man is worth analyzing at length in terms of the gaze and objectification. He

puts Marek on a pedestal literally: he makes him strip and stand on a pedestal in the pose of Donatello's David. The dialogue perfectly captures the process of objectification, in which the object is there purely for the enjoyment of the owner/viewer, who in this case apparently reaches orgasm through verbalizing the aesthetic experience. But it also points to the problem of colonization, since the viewer's knowledge is expressed in complex English Marek can't understand. Marek is reduced to being an object, an immobile statue for the viewer's pleasure, but which viewer - the Englishman or the film audience? Speaking of the use of language, it is interesting to note that while Germans are described as the primary customers for both prostitutes and films, the language of hegemonic colonization in the film is English. In *Not Angels But Angels* one boy speaks English because he was born in the US, but another has obviously learned it for professional reasons, and he hopes to meet an American who will take him abroad. In *Mandragora* Marek shows he has learned the ropes by initiating a conversation in a club in English, and it is in English that he first confesses "I am prostitute." In an interview with a Russian gay journalist, Grodecki confirms all suspicions about his intentions.[23]

He was prompted to make the film by a return in 1992 from Los Angeles to Europe where he found Eastern European children working as prostitutes. "I had never seen people from my native

landsselling their bodies." The clients, he says, were mostly Germans. The boys come into Prague from the provinces and are "infected with the vices of the city." *Body without Soul* is "about everyday evil, the emptiness of evil;" in *Mandragora* the boys "grow out of death, are infected with disease, and deprived of hope for the future." He cites Agnes Varda on the lack of documentarity in documentary films, adding "You have to pay these people, tell them when to begin speaking, when to stop, ask them to repeat something." While he doesn't go so far as to confess scripting them, he comes pretty close. Perhaps most damning, he confesses that "homosexual prostitution became for me a metaphor of many other things" and laments that many people failed to understand this. Gay audiences do not like the films, and Czech audiences think they will tarnish the reputation of the Czech Republic. A review by Czech film critic Jaroslav Sedláček reveals exactly what Grodecki means.[24] First he praises the director for "authenticity without disgusting naturalism," even nudity is used only where needed (in other words, he doesn't disgust his audience with too many depictions of actual homosexual sex). But the same reviewer criticizes Grodecki for unnecessarily excluding the "normal" (i. e. straight) world from the film. "If it weren't for the trip to Usti nad Labem, where we see a young husband and wife pushing a baby carriage, we might think the Czech Republic contained only innocent creatures for sale and deviant foreigners." And why such

a grim portrayal of the provincial factory town, when there are so many lovely spots in our countryside? It calls into question the verisimilitude of the whole film! Sedláček's rosary view of the provinces bears little resemblance to real factory towns after the fall of communism. Grodecki's Russian interviewer - logically - asks if this is not simply homophobia, to which the director replies, "the Czech Republic is a very tolerant country. I don't think homophobia exists here." He goes on to say that he too grew up in a "tolerant country" (Poland), which explains why he doesn't know what a gay audience is and doesn't have any desire to know. "Groups didn't exist, we had simply people." After this simultaneous erasure of homophobia and a gay public, Grodecki goes on to express amusement that his films "receive great reviews at regular film festivals, but are excoriated by the gay press at gay festivals." In other words, his films are approved by a "tolerant" public, but not by the audience whose very existence he denies. How amusing is it? If we look at the trilogy as a whole, there are some very interesting touches. The titles all play into the deployment of spiritual values as the backdrop for the boys' experiences - remember that Grodecki himself says they are about "evil." *Mandragora* is identified on the box as "a plant which according to East Indian folklore grows under the gallows from the sperm of hanged men." Life grows out of death, but life which is already condemned, infested, illusory." The connection between sex and

death is clear. Grodecki points out that the root takes the form of a penis. And mandragora is also mandrake, from which a narcotic was distilled- narcotics play a major role in the film, both in hypnosis and speed. "Body without Soul" refers to a line of questioning Grodecki forces the boys into - they sell their bodies, but not their souls; the body as flesh being reinforced by Rousek as he moves between directing flesh in porn and dissecting flesh in the morgue. Grodecki goes further to claim that the Greek "porno" literally means "body without soul" - in fact it means "prostitute," probably derived from *pernemi*, to export for sale, especially of slaves. Which brings us back to the first film. *Not Angels, but Angels* has the richest title, even if it is the most obscure. The Czech is *Andele nejsou andele*, "Angels are not Angels," which just implies that these boys are not the angels they appear to be. But it is the English title that has a more interesting resonance. It is apparently a reference to a quotation from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, (II:1), usually given in Latin as "Non Angli, sed angeli," and ascribed to Pope Gregory I (540-604). The story is that the pope beheld two English slave boys in a Roman slave market, and when told that they were Angles, he responded, "not Angles, but angels" - they have the faces of angels, and such should be the co-heirs of the angels in heaven. The title is apt, therefore, not only because of the connection between boys and angels, but also because it refers to inter-national, even colonial exploitation (or at

least objectification) of beautiful boys, reifying the Greek etymology of *pornos / porne / porneia* from *pernemi*. The progression of the three films increasingly emphasizes the objectification of the boys, while simultaneously distancing the audience from implication in their objectification. The first film shows the boys as talking heads, with the faces of a few anonymous exploiters (male gazers) intercut to distance the film audience from the objectifying position. The second film includes a pornographer to perform the same role. And the third incorporates a host of objectifying/exploiting/gaze-wielding men who are marked as emphatically not heroes the audience can identify with. For all Grodecki's heavy-handedness in *Mandragora*, though, there is some slippage even here - perhaps showing the hand of the rent-boy (or ex-rent-boy) co-writer? (David's status, by the way, belies the premise of all three films - that the boys are sucked into a vicious cycle of drugs, sex, and victimization that can only end in death. At least one of them co-wrote a film!) Marek's reminiscences show that his father beat him. This suggests a question the filmmaker had failed to ask in the first documentary films, though some boys volunteered the answer anyway: why do they leave home? Many were thrown out by their families. Why? They don't usually say, but could it be because they are gay? And they come to Prague because it is a place they can be gay? The provinces are as bleak and gray in *Mandragora* as they are in reality. Marek seems to be really gay in the

film, and the plot suggests that his relationship with David is not merely exploitative in either direction. There is love here, though the possibility was overtly denied in the earlier "documentary" films. Furthermore, there is a problem with the real marketing and reception of the films. Ostensibly made for a straight audience to decry the exploitation of boys by gay Westerners, the films have been co-produced with Western help, shown at gay & lesbian film festivals to audiences of mostly gay men, and even marketed through Western pornography providers.[25] The last is of course the most bizarre, and the film most often found is *Body without Soul*, which deals with the Czech porn industry itself. Gay audiences in general, and gay porn consumers in particular must develop a particularly layered approach to Grodecki's attempt to distance the audience from the objectifying pornographer. They (we?) must recontextualize the raw images, taking them out of Grodecki's moralizing frame, to see the boys as the aesthetic objects they are in the film within the film. That kind of decontextualizing is certainly what I do with the interview material. This discounting of the frame - perhaps with the complicity of the filmmaker in the case of the porn - recalls the way Soviets used to interpret articles about Western culture. They would ignore the ideological diatribes against Western decadence that framed long quotations while avidly reading the quotations themselves. I say with the complicity of the filmmaker - or at least the distributor - because there are two versions

of the films available. The versions sold through mainstream commercial channels in the US pixellizes anything that smacks of boy-porn, while the version shown at festivals and presumably the one sold through gay porn channels does not. (That this is a ploy to placate viewers or perhaps the law adopted post-production is clear in one scene in which even the English subtitles are pixellized!). The pixellized porn may prevent some viewers from enjoying the gaze, but what of those who buy the unpixellized version and fast-forward through Grodecki's frame - as one would through the plot scenes of a porn film? Hence the question of my title: who's renting these boys? If it is indeed primarily gay consumers of porn, then Grodecki has implicated himself commercially in the very process of exploitation he claims to decry. Not that the boys would really mind. For all Grodecki's attempts to passivize them into the status of victims, their agency keeps bursting through. Even in the first film some say they choose their customers, not vice versa. According to Grodecki and his press they are boy-victims, street children, kids (which problematizes their portrayal in the US: is this kiddie porn or not?). But not only are they in my view the agents of their narratives, many of them choosing their profession, they are also not legally children: the age of consent in the Czech Republic is 15, and almost none of the boys is younger than that. They're clever, too. They live by playing roles, and the role of passive victim for Grodecki's propaganda may be just one more paying role for them - he hints at

this himself. In Grodecki's narrative the boys are of course straight kids, coerced into prostitution by violence and drugs, gay for pay. But in *Body without Soul* one of them says, effectively, "who are they kidding saying they're straight?" In *Mandragora* we learn that many say they're straight to drive up the price. Maybe the boys are just good entrepreneurs, capitalists themselves, rather than helpless straight victims of Western and gay exploitation. Yet even if many say they like sex with men, almost none of them claim to enjoy passive anal sex, which produces a frenzy of demand for the one willing to be passive in the porn films. The porn directors in *Body without Soul* and *Mandragora* are constantly asking, "do you do everything? if you don't get fucked, you *don't* do everything." Marek's volunteering for the passive role in *Mandragora* in this context comes as a shock: "It's not so bad, just relax," he says. David (who's been living and tricking with him for months) responds, "I never suspected you like boys!" His shock mirrors that of the director and the projected audience. But he *does* like boys; and even if he takes what appears to Grodecki to be a passive role, the power dynamic may not be as straightforward (pun intended) as Grodecki would like us to think. It's these queer moments that slip past Grodecki's controlling heterosexual gaze that make the films worth watching. Kevin Moss

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[1] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford U Pr., 1994 p. 106-115.

[2] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage, 1978), 190.

[3] Joseph Boone, "Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism," *iPMLA* 110 (1), 1995, 90.

[4] Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (NY: Routledge, 2003).

[5] Wolff, 54-55.

[6] Matti Bunzl, "The Prague Experience: Gay male Sex Tourism and the Neocolonial Invention of an Embodied Border," in Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, Martha Lampland, eds., *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: U Mich. Pr., 2000), 83.

[7] See Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion* (NY: NYU Press, 1995).

[8] Kevin Moss, "The Underground Closet: Political and Sexual Dissidence in Eastern Europe," in Ellen E. Berry, ed., *Genders 22: Postcommunism and the Body Politic* (1995), 229-251.

[9] quoted in Lionel Joyce, letter to the editor of the *New York i*

[10] Produced by Miro Vostiar, packaging - 1995 *Water Bearer* Films.

[11] Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* (NY: Harper & Row, 1987), 126.

[12] Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (NY:Routledge, 1993), 13.

[13] Rubin, 13.

[14] Rubin, 23.

[15] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC/Penguin, 1972), 47.

[16] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1989), 19.

[17] Mulvey, 25.

[18] Mulvey, 25.

[19] Rubin, 23.

[20] John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Making Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3-16.

[21] D'Emilio, 7.

[22] Packaging - 1997 MKS Video.

[23] Gay.ru <http://koi.gay.ru/art/kino/kino9.htm> (8/12/99).

[24] Jaroslav Sedlaček in Cinema. <http://www.cinema.cz/rec/mandrago/> (25/4/99).

[25] *Fig Leaf*, Vol 2, Issue 17, for example.

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